

**THE 6th GRADE PRIMARY HISTORY BOOK AND THE REACTIONS OF
THE GREEK AND CYPRIOT EDUCATIONAL
COMMUNITIES AND
SOCIETIES**

Petros N. Kimitris, B.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years a strong debate has been introduced and initiated by the government of Cyprus on reforming the structure and goals of education. A comprehensive report, prepared by a group of academics, pointed to the need to reshape the highly Greek-centralized Cypriot educational system (Committee on Educational Reform, 2004) and introduced the first seeds towards Cypriot educational autonomy (Karagiorgi & Nicolaidou, 2010). Among others, it emphasized in reshaping the aims of history education. The main purpose of the course of History, according to the new Curriculum of History (2014) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (2014), was to foster historical thinking and develop historical consciousness. Further, it sought in the development of historical literacy with children's participation in the discovery of historical knowledge, and the use of the new curriculum as a versatile tool which would set the stage for the first view of history as a field of reflection and research.

The aims of history education, depending on the sociohistorical context, may range from the inculcation of national identity to the exploration of otherness (Papadakis, 2008). The strongest weapon for a nation-state is to have and use the teaching of language and history. With these subjects, the state, attempts to pass its traditions, customs, ideals, values and historical achievements to its students and future citizens (Persianis, 2010). Further, history's importance is seen when any two or more governments from any part of the world agree, usually after cruel and bloody conflicts among their states, to appoint joint committees of experts to study the history books and make suggestions for changes. Therefore, the governments of

France and Germany, after the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and World Wars I and II, decided to form a committee to re-write history books that would leave behind the tensions and passions of the World Wars, and lead the two nations through peace in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century (Persianis, 2010). A similar effort was “*Histoire de l' Europe*”, a textbook of European history which was written in 1992 by a group of French speaking European historians and was under the direct support of the European Union (Bakounakis, 2007). The aim of the governments, which were previously in hostility and war, was to abolish the elements that cultivate national prejudices and foster old enemies and passions (Persianis, 2010).

History books and politics have very deep roots that reflect on old responsibilities, sensitivities, disagreements and conflicts. Moreover, they are related to many political, economic, social, cultural, religious and national security issues. History books also value issues of national identity and survival, matters of natural prejudices and themes of national aspirations and ambitions. All these factors repeatedly affect the educational system of Cyprus in various historical and social contexts, and under the pressure of various circumstances. The importance of the course of history explains why the writing of new books often causes acute disagreements and conflicts. The fact that the recent Greek history book for 6th grade primary education which referred to the disaster of Smyrna in 1922 as “thousands of Greeks crowded the harbor trying to get on board and leave for Greece” (Rebousi et al., 2007, p. 100) provoked various social concerns and considerations throughout the Greek and Cypriot societies. This growing imbalance in historical knowledge promotes the study of the reasons behind it as well as of the methods which could be implemented to present the level of knowledge students are

receiving from history books. History is the lesson that navigates the ideological morale and even; the foreign policy of a state. That is why the Orthodox Church, the political parties and the social organizations seek to control the writing of history (Persianis, 2006). What interests affect the reactions of political parties, historians and the wider public? And why did the content of the history book cause reactions?

The recent history of Cyprus has been marked by multiple conflicts and foreign interventions, which provide the socio-political context within which the book under discussion was used. A basic outline of the island's recent political history, highly contested though it is, is necessary as background. A word of caution regarding the limitations and methodology of this study is equally necessary. Discussing history and especially the modern and contemporary age is akin to stepping in the confrontations of a political and academic minefield (Papadakis, 2008). In this report I employ a comparative approach as a critical device of defamiliarisation, and I use a theoretical discussion to indicate the structural problems and limitations of the historical narratives presented in the 6th grade primary history book by focusing on the underlying ideological principles guiding their representations of history.

Cyprus is geographically located in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and this geographical position always had great importance in shaping the island's history and its inhabitant's lives (Hadjidimitriou, 2005). Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, just after Sicily and Sardinia of Italy, with a population of 800,000 inhabitants, as it was estimated in July, 2008 (Pashiardis, 2004). Cyprus' continuity of historical and cultural tradition interacts with recent political and economic commitments in regard to its recent entrance to the European Union in 2004 (Zembylas, 2002). Cyprus survived the Assyrian, Egyptian and

Persian empires and it also came through the rule of Alexander the Great and the Romans in the Ancient world (Hadjidimitriou, 2005). Additionally, Cyprus was the Eastern border of the Byzantine, Frankish and Venetian medieval empires (Persianis, 2010). In the last four centuries, Cyprus was conquered by the Ottoman Turks (1571- 1870) and then passed to the British Empire (1878-1960) which declared Cyprus a British colony in 1925 and ruled the island until 1960, when it became an independent republic (Papadakis, 2008). The recent history of Cyprus has been marked by multiple conflicts and foreign interventions, which provided the socio-political context of the island. The independence of Cyprus came after the EOKA struggle (1955-59) against the British colonial rulers. The struggle, of three hundred militants with the active or passive support of all the Greek Cypriots except the left-wing party members of AKEL, aimed to unite Cyprus with motherland Greece and achieve the enosis, the political union with Greece, but it failed and independence was chosen (Hatzivassiliou, 2005). In 1960, Cyprus was declared an independent state, the Republic of Cyprus whose population was 80% Greek Cypriots, 18% Turkish Cypriots and 2% Armenians, Latins and others (Hadjidimitriou, 2005). The solution of independence failed to satisfy the expectations of the Greek majority who aimed for enosis with the cultural motherland Greece and the Turkish minority that demanded taksim, partition of the island. Both ethnic groups continued to pursue their national objectives and in 1963 intercommunal conflicts broke out. These conflicts continued periodically until 1967 when a new conflict amongst the Greek and Turkish Cypriots broke out (Hadjidimitriou, 2005). With the rise to power of the Greek military government in 1967 the Greek Cypriot leadership gradually abandoned the objective of enosis and sought to safeguard the independence of the Republic of Cyprus (Hatzivassiliou,

2005). With the support of the Greek military government (Junta), that attempted to dictate policies in Cyprus, a small group of right-wing extremists named EOKA B staged a coup on the 15 July 1974, against the island's President Archbishop Makarios III with the purpose to bring union with the motherland Greece (Papadakis, 2008). On the 20 July 1974, Turkey invaded the island and occupied approximately 37% of the total territory of the Republic and nearly 200,000 Greek Cypriots were displaced from the northern Turkish occupied areas of the island to the south that was controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. Around 45,000 Turkish Cypriots were also displaced to the northern side. Greek Cypriots suffered the most in terms of people killed, missing and all other social traumas of war and dislocation. All these and most of all the consequences of the Turkish invasion influenced every part of life in Cyprus, especially the economy, the educational system, and the society (Persianis, 2010). After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus the old Greek Cypriot ideal of enosis, the political union with Greece, collapsed. In 1983, the Turkish Cypriot authorities unilaterally declared their own state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which has since been internationally recognized only by Turkey (Papadakis, 2008). In 1990, Cyprus applied for membership to the European Union and declared the European orientations part of its formal education. In 2004 Cyprus entered the European Union and in 2008 it introduced the Euro as its national currency. These developments along with the globalization on both economic and cultural levels created new needs to modernize all facets of education in Cyprus (Zembylas, 2002).

CHAPTER 1

THE 6th GRADE GREEK PRIMARY HISTORY BOOK IN 2007

A Greek television program, the New Folders, was concerned with the outrage and controversy among political parties, historians and the wider public, caused by the publication of the new primary 6th grade history book in 2007. Additionally, it made a particular reference to the withdrawal of the book from primary schools in response to the considerable reservations according to the appropriateness of its content.

In 2003 the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece decided to change all the books of primary education. Among the books that were going to be changed was the elementary book of history for the 6th grade. In the competition issued by the Pedagogical Institute of Greece a team led by Maria Rebousi, a historian professor from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, won and agreed to write the new history book with the help and assistance of three educators for more than 32,000 euros (Papahelas, 2007).

According to Maria Rebousi her team had set candidacy for writing only the 6th grade elementary history book and wanted only to write “modern and contemporary history for primary 6th graders.” In her interview with the Greek television program, the New Folders, she knew that there were going to be reactions, but never had imagined the intensity and the strength of the reactions of the largest part of the Greek society (Papahelas, 2007).

REACTIONS OF THE GREEK SOCIETY TOWARDS THE 6th GRADE HISTORY BOOK

The reactions started shortly before the book was publicized. In the spring of 2006 the first questions were raised by the school advisors who strangely were aware of some book data that only the writers and the Pedagogical Institute that was supervising should have known. In one of these presentations a teacher of the 4th elementary school of the Greek city of Kilkis, took a sample of the book and at the same night reading through it he said “I did not believe what I saw. It was a total deconstruction of our history” (Papahelas, 2007). In June 2006 the Archbishop of the Church of Greece Christodoulos stated: “We all expect the Prime Minister (Constantinos Karamanlis 2004-2009) with the sensitivities that he has as a Greek and a Macedonian to bring changes to the book before it was too late” (Papahelas, 2007). A few days later at the annual Global Pontic Hellenism congress, the Greeks who lived and live at the shores of the Black Sea in Russia, Georgia and Turkey decided unanimously to condemn the new history book (Papahelas, 2007).

Despite these reactions the history book found its place on the desks of the students in the Greek primary schools in September 2006. Adonis Georgiadis, at that time member of the conservative right wing political party LAOS, condemned the book by saying that “it reduced the image we had on our national identity” and the former minister of Public Order Stelios Papathemelis said that “the book served a new view who wanted to denationalize history, dechristianize history and create a fragmented historical memory” (Papahelas, 2007). The issue of the history book exceeded all ideological lines. A letter that was published in the internet and asked the withdrawal of the history book of the 6th grade of primary education found unexpected support from more than 9000 people from all political parties. Even the

former Foreign Minister Yiannis Kapsis, who originated from Asia Minor (Turkey), was informed by reports about the existence of the book. After reading about the disaster of Smyrna in 1922 when “thousands of Greeks crowded the harbor trying to get on board and leave for Greece” (Rebousi et al., 2007, p. 100) he stated: “It was not only unscientific and idiotic, but it was a very coarse propaganda and a terrible perversion” (Papahelas, 2007).

The spring reactions of 2007 against the book were all across Greece. The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs asked the Academy of Athens to give its opinion if any changes were needed to be made to the book. The Academy of Athens gave its findings to the Minister of National Education and underlined serious omissions, mistakes and carelessness. The Minister of National Education Marietta Giannakou asked for the history book to be corrected, but nothing was to be done before the parliamentary elections of 16 September 2007.

The Minister of National Education Marietta Giannakou also had to defend the presence and the existence of the history book even in the Hellenic (Greek) Parliament. The independent member of the parliament and former minister of Public Order Stelios Papathemelis, who led the campaign against the book, along with other parliamentarians, personalities and members of the conservative right and the Church of Greece were specifically reacting against the following contents of the book. Firstly, on page 22, the 6th grade history book referred to Cosmas of Aetolia without being previously attributed with the adjective ‘holy’. Secondly, on page 42, the War of Independence of the Greeks against the Ottomans was presented, but the history book did not mention the symbolism of the date of 25 March (the immaculate conception of Virgin Mary and the Greek Independence Day), neither did it refer to the raising of the banner of ‘freedom or death’ by Bishop Palaion Patron Germanos.

Further, the history book referred to the groups of armed men that lived on the Greek mountains and were fighting against the Ottoman administration as common thieves (kleftes) with a small k, while the Greek historiography refers to them as ‘Kleftes’ with a capital K. In the same chapter, on page 24, the Ottoman period was presented as a period of history in which parts of the Greek population prospered, and additionally the daily life of the Ottoman rule was not presented in a negative way. The 1940 epic war of Greece against fascist Italy of Benito Mussolini in World War II (1939-1945) and at a time when Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy controlled all of Europe except Greece, Great Britain and the USSR (Spain and Switzerland were neutral) was described on page 109 with the sentence “the Greeks drove away the Italian troops from the Greek-Albanian border.” Finally, when the 6th grade history book referred to the Asia Minor catastrophe in 1922 it aroused the biggest reactions, as it was considered that there was an attempt to silence massacres of Greek-speaking populations of Smyrna by the Kemalist Turkish army. The sentence “On the 27 August 1922 the Turkish army entered Smyrna. Thousands of Greeks crowded the harbor trying to get on board and leave for Greece” (Rebousi et al., 2007, p. 100) and on page 103 a photo caption that stated “after the entry of Turkish troops in Smyrna, the Greeks of the region are trying in every way to escape” provoked the intensity of the reactions.

These reactions and their intensity were justified because a very large part of the Greek population is composed of refugees who managed to survive the brutality of the Turks in Asia Minor. Further, all Greek high school students are taught about the Smyrna catastrophe through the impartial and objective literary book of Didos Soteriou ‘Matomena Homata’ (Bloody Soil). Indicative of the disaster of Smyrna

was the testimony of Th. Petsali-Diomidi that was published in the Cypriot newspaper Simerini (August 31, 2014) and described the catastrophe:

Thousands of Christians (Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians) had gone to the beaches of Asia Minor hoping to save themselves, from the Turks that had entered the city of Smyrna, even by swimming to the nearby Greek islands. The first Turks entered Smyrna. No one and nothing could restrain them. They poured into the city and started slaughtering, rapping and grabbing. The first fires had already been lit... In this maelstrom mothers lost their children and husbands lost their wives... Christians were jumping into the water begging for their lives and begging for help (p. 16).

Despite the intensity of the reactions against Rebousis et al's history book the central right government of 'New Democracy' was re-elected, after the parliamentary elections of the 16 September 2007. Marietta Giannakou, the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, lost her seat as a member of the Greek parliament, because Greek voters had rejected the methods she had used for the case of the book, whereas other candidates, such as Adonis Georgiadis, won seats as members of the Greek parliament because of their aggression against the history school book. Additionally, the attitude towards the history book resulted in the creation or destruction of political careers. Further, the Pedagogical Institute stated that the changes made to the book by the author were not satisfactory and the new Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs Evripides Stylianidis withdrew the book and restored the previous one, which was written in 1989 (Papahelas, 2007).

Maria Rebousi, head of the academic team that authored the new history book, said that "the withdrawal of the book was an irresponsible act because it sent a book that was written 20 years ago to schools for the children to be taught" (Papahelas, 2007). Further, the author also commented that "the book was not wanted from the beginning by neither the Ministry nor the Pedagogical Institute" (Papahelas, 2007). It was clear that Rebousi and her team had anticipated and

expected the reactions the book might have provoked but not with the intensity of feeling that characterized the controversy.

REACTIONS OF THE CYPRIOT SOCIETY TOWARDS THE 6th GRADE HISTORY BOOK IN 2007

Reactions against the history book for the 6th grade of primary education reached also Cyprus where the Ministry of Education and Culture was preparing changes for the references that had to do only with Cyprus. The reactions were as intensive as in Greece for the content of Rebousi et al's history book but were mainly based on events that were not related to Cyprus. Members of the Cypriot Federation of Greek Teachers (a former Headmaster and a primary school History teacher) referred to the book as “anti-educational and an unsuitable textbook for teaching the lesson of history” because of its inaccuracies. These reactions from the educational community of Cyprus brought the Ministry of Education and Culture in an unauthorized position to propose changes that did not have to do with the history of Cyprus. Additionally, the Department of Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture had established a departmental committee with representatives from the Pedagogical Institute, the University of Cyprus and the Cypriot Federation of Greek Teachers (POED) to suggest changes that had to be made in the 6th grade primary history book (Changes to the Primary History Book, 2007).

According to the newspaper Politis the proposed changes were limited to just three points. On page 121 of the history book the map of Cyprus was shown with two colours (yellow was used to show the area that was under the control of the Republic of Cyprus and with brown the area of the island that was under Turkish

Cypriot ‘administration’, according to Rebousi, and not 37% of the Republic of Cyprus under Turkish occupation after the invasion of the island in 1974). The Ministry of Education and Culture proposed a map with one colour and the possessions to be observed with a red line that will denote the confrontation line. Further, the Ministry suggested a change in a sentence that described the Cyprus problem: “the accession of Cyprus to the European Union in 2004, gave a new hope to solve the problem” and asked for the sentence “in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations and the European Union” to be added (Changes to the Primary History Book, 2007, p. 47). It is truly remarkable that POED supported the changes proposed by the Ministry of Education and Culture but insisted the withdrawal of the book because of its historical mistakes and omissions regarding the Greek national history rather than the Cypriot context.

Maria Rebousi in her article ‘Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot history textbooks’ attempted to dispel the reaction of the Cypriot Federation of Greek Teachers (POED) by addressing their intensive reactions to divisive narratives of history that reflected and divided the social and political practices of Cyprus. Further, through the article, the author, attempted to consolidate that in Cyprus only Cypriots live, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots that were divided by the British policy ‘divide and rule’ and by the competing national centres of Greece and Turkey. The new history book, according to Rebousi, prescribed new social policies and practices for the co-existence of the Cypriots (Rebousi, 2007).

All of these references and omissions did not however make the history book useless or bad. In the Greek television program the New Folders Rebousi insisted that the 6th grade history book presented a series of innovations which could be easily recognized when reading the book. The Cypriot educational officials stressed

that these microhistory innovations could assist the students to understand clearer a historical period but also to enlighten historical events or even social groups that were not mentioned in previous historical textbooks. References to the role of women in the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire in 1821, the Macedonian struggle (1904-1908) for the liberation of the province of Macedonia from the Ottoman Empire, the Greek civil war (1944-1949), the Junta dictatorship (1967-1974) and the coup against the President of the Republic of Cyprus Makarios III in 1974. One of the critics of the book, Professor of Philosophy of the Aegean University, Constantinos Romanos said that:

The content of the book was based on post-modern historiography. The pattern of modern dominance theory was the abandonment of great narratives, such as for example that of a nation, and the adoption of smaller narratives that would deliver a mosaic of events on the historical period that was examined. The theoretical background was responsible for the use of neutral expressions from the author of the book, to her references to the great events of modern Greek history (Changes to the primary history book, 2007, p. 47).

REACTIONS AND THE CONTENT OF THE HISTORY BOOK

The main reason given in the literature influencing reactions of the political parties, historians and the wider public is the attempt to edit or even change the content of the history book. Similarly, the same reason is cited by the educational modulators and officials but also from the Churches of Cyprus and Greece. The reason mentioned the most by the officials and the ecclesiastic representatives was the usefulness for any changes in the content of the history book. It is worth noticing that in Rebousis' et al's book the main reactions focused on the attempt to edit or change the content of the events and rewrite history.

Similarly many academics, politicians and journalists found very disturbing even “idiotic” (Papahelas, 2007) Rebousis et al’s 6th grade history book (2007). It is worth saying that they were particularly negative towards any changes in the history book but also underlined serious omissions, mistakes and carelessness. Rebousi’s history book, due to the intensity of the reactions for its content, was withdrawn from the educational systems of Cyprus and Greece.

Content pressure and historical traditions were the main reasons in the literature why in 2007 a controversy broke out amongst opposing political factions. These prejudices were so strong and deep that hardly any consensus could be allowed. In fact, it was more preferable for the previous history book to be taught in schools rather than a new history book with historical mistakes and omissions to be introduced.

INFORMING THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

The main purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of the reactions against the Greek 6th grade primary history book that was introduced to the Cypriot educational system in 2007. The results from the present study underline the importance of the course of history and explain why the writing of a new book often causes acute disagreements and conflicts. In addition, History is the lesson that navigates the ideological morale and even; the foreign policy of a state. That is why the Orthodox Church, the political parties and the social organizations seek to control the writing of history.

In addition, both the reactions of the political parties and the wider public were guided by national survival syndromes. This national pride and security was

used by the political parties to guide the public not just because the school book had historical mistakes but to obtain more voters in the future. This is proven by the reactions towards or against Rebousi et al's 6th grade history school book. In 2007 after the parliamentary elections of the 16 September 2007, Marietta Giannakou, the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, lost her seat as a member of the Greek parliament, because the Greek voters had rejected the methods she had used for the case of the book, whereas other candidates, such as Adonis Georgiadis, won seats as members of the Greek parliament because of their aggression against the history school book. Factors like new methods of writing history books, multiculturalism, multidimensional truth and the principles of the European Union (Council of Europe, 2001) do not seem to be that influential in limiting the reactions against the introduction of new history school book as in the literature examined. Nonetheless, it is not known whether these factors could be strong enough to motivate the Cypriot and the Greek governments to re-write history books and reduce the political and public tensions and objections.

Therefore, if the political parties, the Orthodox Church and the educational policymakers in Cyprus want history school books to be modernized and objectively present the historical reality they must first make sure that any researchers who will be appointed to write the books will be ideologically independent and not members of political parties. In other words, there should be an ideological balance between the historical researches. In this way, the political parties and especially the Orthodox Church will not be considering a history school book guided or even directed towards a certain political dogma. If this is achieved then it is believed that the new history school book will examine and evaluate the experience of a nation without the fear and tensions of making historical mistakes. Also, an effort from the

government of Cyprus and especially from the Ministry of Education and Culture should be made which will help the society to accept without tensions a new history school book. In this way, as well as with more help from the political parties, it will enable the new school book to be more exposed to the country's culture.

In addition, teachers should also make an effort to change the view that history is a lesson that does not only evaluate and teach the glorious moments of a nation but it must present its darkest ones also. Nonetheless, if history teachers get the necessary attention and feel that they can be good in teaching history then all the society will be willing to try a new history school book. Furthermore, teachers should try to make history a lesson where students will develop their critical thinking by using multiple sources to reach objective conclusions. It is believed that a new history school book will be beneficial for both the students and the Cypriot society.

NARRATIVE, MEMORY AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN CYPRUS

The Cypriot educational system for ideological purposes (primary goal of education was to stimulate the national morale and promote enosis, the union with Greece) along with practical (ensuring the right number of graduates from Cypriot six-year high schools to be accepted without exams at Greek universities), was almost completely identical to the Greek system (Persianis, 2010). The only exception was for primary education which was imposed by the British administration from 1935 with a different curriculum (Government of Cyprus, 1935; MoEC, 2003).

After independence from British rule in 1960, an independent educational policy that met the needs of a modern and sovereign state became subject to discussions. This effort to have an independent educational system was very difficult because of the large and acute dilemmas in educational principles, and the deep divisions between political parties and individuals. The politicized education that started during the Turkish rule of the island (1571-1878) continued and was more intense when Cyprus became independent (1960), but with different contents and presentations.

An example of political education on the content of a history book was described. The first hard clash of the opposing factions took place in Greece where Rebousis' et al's 6th grade primary history book was presented and the second by the Cypriot educational system. The comparison between these two examples is very difficult, because they occurred in two different countries and were based on different historical events.

However, some elements and features in common can be traced. Firstly, this history school book caused a very high political and social sensitivity and great importance was attached to it. Further, the involvement in the clashes of the opposing factions of the highest political level indicates the gravity and importance of writing a new history school book. In addition, the dominance of prejudices in the public debate made logic and sober discussions impossible. National pride and security was used by the political parties to guide the public not just because the school book had historical mistakes but to obtain more voters in the future. This is proven by the reactions towards or against Rebousi et al's 6th grade history school book. In 2007 after the parliamentary elections of the 16 September 2007, Marietta Giannakou, the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, lost her seat as a member of the Greek parliament, because the Greek voters had rejected the methods she had used for the case of the book, whereas other candidates, such as Adonis Georgiadis, won seats as members of the Greek parliament because of their aggression against the history school book. Furthermore, the dominance of political rather than scientific and pedagogical arguments in the discussion of the issue and the fear of misrepresentation and falsification of truth was in 2007 as fierce in Cyprus as it was in Greece.

All these demonstrate that the writing and publication of a history school book still has the same political importance as it also had. The opposing factions clash not just in the scientific and pedagogical fields but also in the ideological and political ones.

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